

Larry Evans came to visit my crew in Kings Canyon National Park a few weeks back. He asked me, "Did you get what you came for?" The question caught me off guard and I answered with a simple, "Yes." The question then is, "What did I come for?" I was at a loss for words then and I could only tell him that I have no regrets. I've spent the time since trying to organize my thoughts so that I could put my feelings into words.

What initially attracted me about the program was the idea of living in a national park, and the simplicity involved in that type of lifestyle, living on the bare minimum. I thought that maybe one of the things I would learn from the program is not to take things for granted, but that's not what happened at all. Instead I stood back from my life and realized what an excess of things I have. Hopefully I can always remember this and be less of a consumer. On the other hand, and I can't say I took my friends or family for granted before, but I have definitely developed a deeper appreciation of them. Maybe what it is, is that people take for granted the ability to verbally communicate with their loved ones, either face-to-face or by phone. Your friends are always with you even when they are a thousand miles away, and their letters and support meant more to me than they will ever know.

I came to be challenged. I love nothing more than to be worked to my physical limit and I suppose that ties in to becoming self-disciplined. During my [pre-season application] interview with Larry Evans, he asked me what I thought would be my biggest adjustment if I were accepted into the program and I said, "Honestly...waking up at 5:00 in the morning", and he laughed. (Larry, that's not funny, even God isn't up at that time.) But, I adjusted....much to even my own amazement. I liked doing PT (physical training), even though some mornings it was hard to get into the groove.

Over the past few months, my crew has grown so much. Although we've declined in numbers, our strength is immeasurable. They are people who, in years to come, I will always look back to remember with love and affection. We may have thought, at the start of the season, that we were strong, but we only had the desire to be strong. I think we have all become stronger as individuals as well as members of our communities as a result of this program.

It would be unfortunate to see this program come to an end. I will never forget my time in Kings Canyon or the people I shared it with. Thank you, Larry Evans, Peter Lewis, the CCC, AmeriCorps, my crew, crewleader and sponsors, and anyone else who helped make this program possible.

Peace & Love,

Erin Andrews—Kings Canyon Crew, 2003